



Pre-Texts

Literacy - Innovation - Citizenship

Pre-Texts is a train-the-trainers pedagogy developed by the Cultural Agents Initiative at Harvard University, and available to outside partners through Cultural Agents, Inc. The methodology combines three complementary goals of holistic education: high-order literacy, innovation, and citizenship.

The simple protocol of Pre-Texts turns educators into facilitators for student-centered learning. Unlike conventional pedagogy (in which teachers pose questions and know answers), here students formulate their own questions to a text and then speculate about possible responses. They also “go off on tangents” to connect independent reading with classroom texts. The program achieves “close reading” by stimulating a range of interpretations. It fosters autonomy and collaboration by students who re-purpose texts and other materials for participatory, eco-friendly, learning.

The approach adjusts to the tastes and talents of participants who explore difficult texts as points of departure, pretexts for making art (painting, music, dance, theater, writing, technology, fashion, photography, cooking etc.). As artists, students become users of challenging vocabulary, grammar and concepts in any field, often exploring their personal feelings and concerns. Original work by other students awakens admiration among classmates and sets the ground for good citizenship. When everyone is an artist, bullying disappears.

“Pre-Texts has been a very enriching experience that led to re-signify our processes of teaching and learning (not only of texts) as much inside the classroom as outside. It invited us to reframe our ways of working and of being with others, whether they are students, partners, or equals. The follow-up meetings on Saturdays provided important feedback and supported improvement.”

[Unsolicited note from Patricia Rivera, Pre-Texts weaver in CECREA Coyhaique, Chile.]

Recycling texts is an especially attractive approach now that many countries have adopted skills-based and universal designs for learning. Pre-Texts grounds these good intentions in art-making and popular practices, to engage students at any level. With Pre-Texts, even low-resourced schools can promote high-order learning. Intellectual rigor and civic development go hand in hand through the challenges and pleasures of making art.

A Certificate Program at Harvard University's Bok Center for Teaching and Learning, Pre-Texts has also been adopted by Partners in Health, The Harvard Art Museums, Boston area schools, and throughout Latin America (Colombia, Mexico, Peru, Chile, Argentina, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Puerto Rico...) as well as in Hong Kong and Zimbabwe.

Training lasts 15 hours, to ensure that each of the 25 new participants leads an activity. A follow up protocol of weekly meetings and mutual visits establishes the new approach as a regular practice.



For information on our training workshops, implementation support, and intervention programs email us at:
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